

YOUR FIRST

Therapy Sessions



10 TOP TIPS
FOR
BEGINNERS

INTRODUCTION

so you are going to therapy?

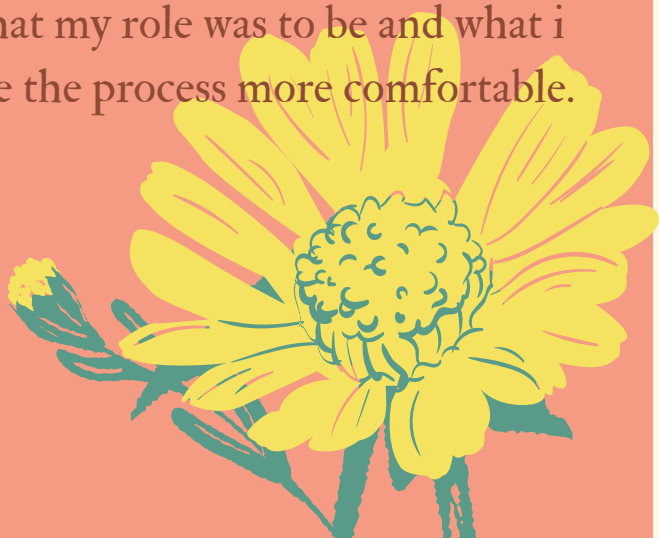
Starting any kind of therapy is daunting.

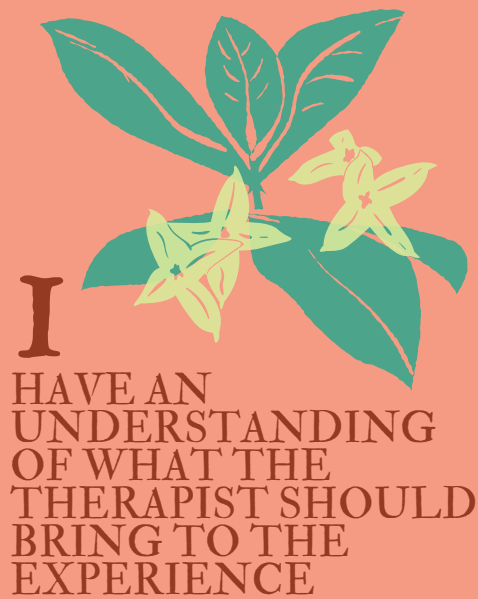
You might be feeling slightly apprehensive, a tad bit defensive and very very anxious. That is completely normal! You are about to embark on a journey, where you need to talk to a stranger about your deepest secrets, insecurities and how they make you feel. It is not easy!

Therefore, I have put together 10 key tips that I have learnt and want to make you aware of before you step foot into the therapy room.

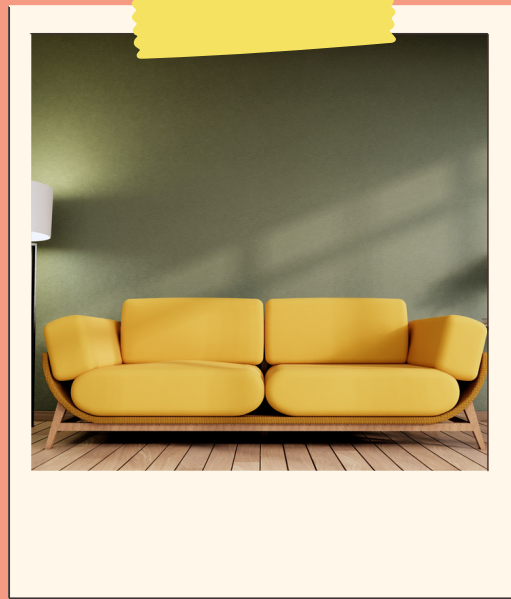
I want to share these insights because if I had an understanding of these 10 concepts before I started therapy back in 2013, I feel like my journey would have been a whole lot smoother. They would have helped me to know what to expect, what my role was to be and what i could have done to make the process more comfortable.

Happy Reading
Love Rachel





I
HAVE AN
UNDERSTANDING
OF WHAT THE
THERAPIST SHOULD
BRING TO THE
EXPERIENCE



The therapist works for YOU! You do not work for them.

On your first session (or even during further sessions) ask questions. Ask them questions in relation to providing you with the right support. Ask them about their treatment approach and basically, if they think that they can help you overcome your issue.

If you don't think that they are suitable for you or you don't gel with the person, you are not obliged to enter or stay within a therapeutic contract. (This applies more to private therapy compared to therapy treatment on the NHS. With treatment on the NHS you may not have a choice which therapist you see, but if you really do not get on with this person, you need to ask them if it would be possible to have somebody else. The therapist should understand and even applaud you for being so honest.)

A good therapist should be able to 'hold' your issues.

A therapeutic relationship is one where you should feel at ease and feel able to trust this person with your vulnerability and sensitive information.

When I say 'hold' you issues, I mean that a good therapist will make you feel listened to, have bucket loads of empathy and ensure you that they have your best interests at heart. They will be able to listen to whatever you tell them and not react in a harmful way. They will act as someone who can take the weight of what you have been holding and share the act of carrying it with you.

It is not the therapist's job to fix you.

Prior to going into your first therapy session, be it your first session ever or with a new therapist, you have to banish any idea that the therapist will fix your problem.

Only you can do that!

A therapist is there to guide you with their expert knowledge and facilitate your journey in creating a positive change for yourself.

2 BE CLEAR ON WHAT YOU NEED TO BRING TO THE RELATIONSHIP



You need to bring a certain attitude in order to benefit from the guidance of the therapist.

This includes 3 things:

- Being Honest
- Being Open-minded
- Being Willing

These three characteristics are key for going into therapy and I am not going to lie, are difficult to achieve.

But if you go into your therapy session, just being aware that these are key to any positive development, then you are much more likely to mould this attitude than if you were not aware of them.

Bring your character.

On the surface, therapy is serious, life altering work, but underneath is a core relationship between two people. Humour, wisdom, imagination all form the basis of a strong therapeutic relationship. Allow yourself to be the person you are in your most safest environment. Relax into the non therapeutic conversation in order to create a strong therapeutic bond.



3 HAVE A PRE AND POST THERAPY SELF-CARE ROUTINE



Before and after a therapy session, you can experience various thoughts and emotions. Therefore, it is important to make sure you have something in place that will soothe you back to your normal state of being so that you can continue with your day.

These activities will not only help you to continue with your day but they will regulate the body and the mind. The routine doesn't have to be long, it may only take one or two activities. Even if you don't feel that you need to regulate your body, your mind may be still focused on therapy talk or topics you talked about.

It is a good idea to separate out what is therapy time and what isn't with a mental reset. Activities may include: Going for a walk

- Having a coffee
- Playing your favourite music
- Wrapping up with a blanket
- Ringing family member or friend
- Browsing the shops
- Watching a few funny videos.
- Journaling

Whatever settles you for before and after a therapy session is a good idea to prep you for different times of the day.



PLAY YOUR FAVOURITE MUSIC

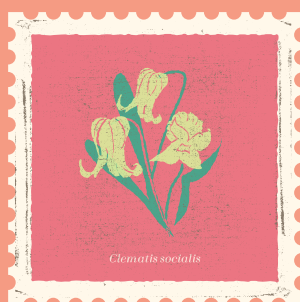


GRAB A COFFEE AND A CAKE

4 BE COMFORTABLE

TAKE YOUR SHOES OFF

The therapist will help you to feel emotionally comfortable whilst in a session, but there is no shame in wanting to also feel physically comfortable. A therapy room is a safe space, therefore act (within reason) as you would in another safe space.



PUT YOUR FEET UP

As soon as I sat down in my usual armchair, I would proceed to take my shoes off, tuck my feet underneath my bum and accept the kindly offered cup of coffee. To me, this settled me into the session and instantly I felt at ease because I was comfortable.

SIT ON THE FLOOR

Don't feel like you are restricted to sitting on the chairs provided. There have been instances where I wanted to sit on the floor, out of choice or because I was feeling vulnerable and needed to soothe myself. Sitting on the floor has always done that for me.



ASK FOR A DRINK

Take refreshments with you or kindly ask for a glass of water. Talking is thirsty work. Also if you are restless like me and have wandering hands, holding onto a cup or glass really helps to keep you grounded and focused.

5

PAUSE



When you are in the midst of the therapy two-way conversation, it can feel necessary to answer quickly. Sometimes you can rush to provide the 'right' answer. You may answer quickly to come across as confident in what you are saying. But sometimes rushing means you are not thinking deep enough. You may also say something that isn't true and steer the conversation down a road that doesn't apply to you. It could be a waste of precious time.

Some people feel uncomfortable with gaps or quiet moments in conversation, but if you allow yourself time to pause and think about what you want to say, you may come across clearer, be closer to your truth and prompt further in-depth conversation. It is a lot easier to talk surface-level stuff, but the deeper, more meaningful, impactful conversation comes from focused thinking. I can spend many minutes sitting in thinking mode whilst my therapist looks on. I have gotten used to the awkward silence and with time so can you. If you focus in on what it is you want to say, everything around you will not matter anymore. By doing this you are also communicating to the therapist that you are exploring the topic of conversation and hopefully, they will appreciate the effort you are putting in.

If you can think deeper before you speak, you are going to have a more mindful conversation. Important topics and relevant information is more likely going to be brought into awareness and breakthroughs are more likely to occur.

6

USE YOUR NOTES APP



It is important that you keep your notes app, a piece of paper or a journal handy. Any time outside of therapy, something may prompt you into thinking about a topic, memory or conversation that you want to discuss within the confines of the therapy session.



I have a 'therapy topics' page pinned to the top of my notes app and I write down anything that I wish to discuss. A trigger may have caused you distress, a memory may have resurfaced, you may have had a good experience or used a therapeutic skill and wish to share it. It could be anything, but noting it down takes the pressure off of you trying to remember in what can feel like a pressurised environment.

7 WRITE IT DOWN

This tip is different to the previous point of noting down topics to discuss. This tip is all about writing something down that you find difficult to express out loud. Do you get anxious when talking about something uncomfortable? Find yourself freezing or clamming up? Does the clock run on whilst all the time you are in your head, trying to speak but the words just won't come out. This is when writing down the difficult things can come in handy. I have lost count the amount of times I have done this and used it in a therapy session. I have written letters to loved ones, things that I want to say but find difficult to talk about and memories that trigger discomfort. You could even ask the therapist to read it aloud so you don't have to, or they can even read it in silence and then go on to talk about it. This way you have faced the difficulty of writing it down but are not reliving the discomfort. Writing things down also gives you more time to think and articulate yourself clearly. This can help the therapist understand your point of view more effectively, which enables them to alter their part in the conversation.

Writing it down does not mean you are avoiding the uncomfortable thing. It is still a means of communication. It is just one that may ease you slightly.

8

CREATE A JOURNALING REFLECTION SHEET



You don't want to leave your session, having done ground breaking work and forget it all, do you? I have found that having space for a few reflective questions after a session has really helped me to embed the work done. I start with noting down:

1. What went well?

It is important to remember any breakthroughs or highs of the session. Therapy work is reason to be proud of your efforts.

Then I move on to remembering:

2. What was difficult?

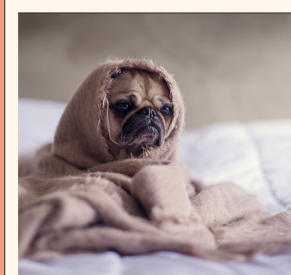
This allows me to pin point what I need to work on or go over again next session. It offers space to examine the reasons why I struggled and what that might mean for me. Don't forget that breakthroughs can also come from what we find challenging. Lastly I like to add any prompts for next session so that I have a goal or target set ahead of time.

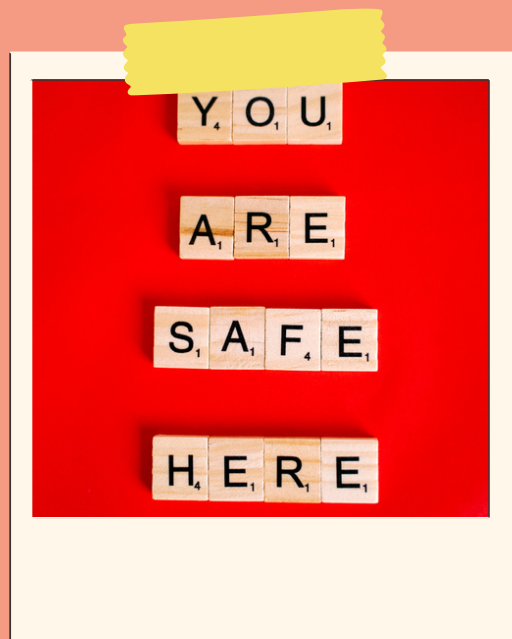


9 STRESS RELIEF & SUGAR

During therapy your body can go through a lot. If you get anxious, your body is likely to tense up. All of the tension uses up a lot of energy, so come the end of your session, you can be feeling quite worn out. Therefore, it is a good idea to have a bit of sugar with you in the form of a fizzy drink or a chewy sweet. Sugar can provide a relatively quick and tasty source of energy that helps us in times of low energy. If the work in therapy is draining us mentally and physically, we are going to need that quick boost for the journey home.

In addition, with the possibility of high emotional states, it likely that you may need to regain a sense of calm. I would recommend bringing an item that can be used as a stress reliever. A ball, something soft to touch or a tactile object. Something that will help ground you in times of emotional distress. You could even bring an object that may soothe you, a blanket or a soft toy for example. Anything that can offer you a sense of comfort incase the work you are doing evokes deep emotion.





I want to use the last tip to remind you that the therapist is there to help you. They are not there to catch you in a lie or judge you. They are there to facilitate a conversation within a safe environment. One in which the aim is to feel comfortable enough to work through what you are finding challenging.

THANK YOU

I hope you found my 10 Top Tips helpful with your therapy journey. Everything that I have mentioned is taken from my own experiences, what i have learned and developed over the years I have had the pleasure of being in therapy. If you have any questions, you can email me at: thetherapyveteran@gmail.com

Love Rachel